Jeremy was referred to BCPS for the first time in 2015. During his initial period with us, he struggled with compliance, and after a couple of months, his case was closed. In 2020, he was once again referred to BCPS. Similar to 2015, Jeremy struggled to be compliant with program requirements. By the end of 2021, he had hit rock bottom. But this only inspired him to change his life around. Since January of 2022, Jeremy has fully committed to recovery and on being the best version of himself that he can be.

During Overdose Awareness Month, Jeremy ran a 5k in 27 minutes and 26 seconds for NOT ONE MORE, an organization that raises awareness for the prevention of drug overdoses.

Jeremy completed the growth track classes at Spring Valley Church, which met for 6 hours on Saturdays. At the age of 43, he got baptized for the very first time. For the past few months, he has been working at Progress Rails in the panel shops area. On June 6th, he started attending RCC to obtain an associate’s degree in addiction studies. Additionally, he finds time in his busy schedule to attend a Mindset Mindfulness group with his wife in the evenings.

Jeremy would like to volunteer and share his insights into recovery in hopes that he may be able to help someone find the freedom he has found and not be a slave to an active addiction.

I always say that “when the pain of remaining the same becomes greater than the pain of change, change becomes welcome.” I think that’s where I was at. I was almost dying. I had to lose everything and go through all that pain to get to where I am at today. And I am grateful for everything I’ve been through. I am filled with all this gratitude and tenacity and drive to keep pushing forward.

~Jeremy Geissler
FORTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER

James is one of the 300 individuals age 60 or older arrested between 1975 and 1990 that was sentenced to life imprisonment in Pennsylvania. But he always hoped that one day he would walk out from behind the prison walls as a free man.

Through his prison-based activism, James sought to reform excessively punitive sentencing policies. He asked the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing to allow rehabilitated seniors 65 or older who are serving a life sentence and have completed at least 25 years of that sentence, or who have reached the age of 60 and served at least 40 years of that sentence, the chance to petition the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole for release consideration.

James was 9 when he committed the robbery and fatal shooting which resulted in his incarceration. Because of a heroin addiction, it was put forth for him to serve 8-20 years. But in the end, he served 48 years. On March 5, 2021, the Board of Pardons unanimously voted to recommend James’ application for commutation to Governor Wolf for his signature. James walked free on March 26, 2021.

Last September, James graduated from our R3 Program. Cohort 22.

AWARDS BREAKFAST HIGHLIGHTS

BCPS’s Annual Awards Breakfast was held on April 19th, and had a record number of nearly 120 attendees! It was kicked off with Hamilton Newton, former client and 2022 awardee, reading the children’s book, When I Grow Up. Just like in the book, each individual contributed by a community member made the perfect pot of soup in which they all could enjoy, he shared how each opportunity presented to him started a RIPPLE EFFECT that changed the course of his life. Hamilton’s personal growth, from rock bottom in a cell to a radio personality and founding member of The Forge, personifies BCPS’s vision of a better community because people with justice involvement have the tools and support they need to succeed.

Ruby Martin was inducted as in the 2022 Life Improvement Ambassador. Paul J. Hoh Life Improvement Award honorees included Bob Williams, County Probation and Parole Chief (ret.). Safe Berks, Alice Moyor and West Lawn UMC, New Castle Lawn and Landscaping, and ABC Keystone and ABC Eastern PA. Receiving the newly established Kip Frasso Outstanding Transformation Award were Benjamin Marrero-Rivera, Hamilton Newton, and Paul Zenone.

ON LEADERSHIP BERKS!

Stephan, an R3 graduate, attended our spring Returning Citizens Career Fair with his Human Resources representative Erin Hartnett, from Kymera International/Reading Alloys, to help promote their employment opportunities. During the R3 program, Stephan had heard about a job at Kymera, where he could earn up to $19 an hour. It was the highest starting pay he had ever heard of! A representative from Kymera attended his R3 graduation ceremony, where Stephan was presented with the offer of employment. Stephan remembers being told it was going to be hard work, and that proving himself further motivated him. He worked hard so he could earn that rate. And he did just that!

The Reentry Employment Development Initiative (REDI) groups are back! These groups are open to all of our clients and focus on discussing reentry and workforce development topics. Topics include, but are not limited to, the importance of networking, job retention, how to put yourself in a position for advancement, how to handle time-gaps in your resume, and how to answer tough interview questions about your past. Many clients use these groups to discuss past personal interview experiences and to learn how they can implement these new tools learned in the classroom in their job search.

$1.2 MILLION - UNITED WAY GRANT

In April, the United Way of Berks County awarded a 1.2 million dollar 3-year grant that will allow BCPS to operate Reentry Works.

Reentry Works expands BCPS workforce services to all individuals in Berks County with current or past justice system involvement. The program is designed to help clients become reliable and successful employees to help address issues of unemployment and underemployment of the justice involved. The program uses a case-managed approach and creates individualized employment plans for our clients. The program’s curriculum includes skill, education, and experience assessments, financial literacy, employment preparedness, computer labs, and employer recruitment.

POWER OF THE PURSE GRANT - $10,000

BCPS was awarded a $10,000 grant from the Power of the Purse. These funds will be used towards removing obstacles to employment and education for women with justice involvement. More often than not, many of our clients cannot accept new job opportunities due to issues with transportation. At BCPS, we provide bus passes and taxi and Uber/Lyft vouchers, as well as other items needed to start a job such as an identification, birth certificate, work boots, and tools. Additionally, this grant will enable our clients to cover basic and urgent needs, including cell phone minutes – so they can receive the call from an employer offering them a job.

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Thank you to The Forge for their suit donation for our R3 graduates. Looking good and feeling good before a job interview is key to excelling at an interview. With these suits our clients will be able to look their best while looking for new job opportunities, or whenever a suit would be appropriate. These suits will also be tailored to ensure our clients present their best selves forward. Thank you to Eben Wood and Hamilton Newton for making this possible.

The Forge anticipates this as an ongoing donation for each of the future graduating R3 cohorts.

Thank you, to the gentlemen of The Forge!